

I am Jeanette Zentgraf, Communications Coordinator for CWA and I support HB516, because we believe that it is unjust for a City Council to ignore the Montana State Legislature's decisions over many years. After careful deliberation, which included 3 readings in House and Senate committees and the Governor's approval, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression were not added to Montana's anti-discrimination laws. The Montana State legislative process is very fair.

On the other hand the Missoula City Council embraced the Montana Human Rights Network's effort, aided by the ACLU, to include sexual orientation, gender identity or expression in an anti-discrimination ordinance. Before the public hearing, a clarion call went out for people to come forward with their complaints. Not even one person acknowledged that they were discriminated against in housing, employment or accommodation. Only one person came forward, a mechanic who had just told his boss about his gender identity. The boss was supportive.

Without evidence of discrimination in the City of Missoula, the City Council ignored all the pages of evidence, which were submitted prior to the hearing by Concerned Women for America and others and supported the additions with great fanfare. Minutes before the public hearing, Mayor Engen spoke at a Public School Flagship Rally to support diversity and promote tolerance for homosexuals. While our friends were waiting outside, the students from the rally paraded by with signs for us to become tolerant. I waited 2 hours to speak for CWA at the public hearing even though I knew that some members of the National New Progressive Leaders Council were influential members of the Missoula City Council. Those at the public hearing who favored the ordinance simply spent their 3 minutes deriding the opponents, as people who are afraid of homosexuals and those who are different. A young woman, the daughter of one of the opponents, came from Spokane, to declare for the first time, that she was a lesbian. She scolded her father for his stand. A group of opponents tried to have the issue brought up for a vote this past November, but they were unsuccessful. There was always something wrong with the petition. I find it difficult to believe that the people wanted this ordinance when hundreds of letters of opposition were received by the City Council.

Please support HB 516. Let the State Legislature decide who should be a protected class under state law.

Respectfully submitted,
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